

FOSTERING LEADERSHIP IN HIGH SCHOOL FEMALE ATHLETES THROUGH  
SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY AND GOAL SETTING

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Fostering Leadership in High School Female Athletes Through Sports Psychology and Goal  
Setting

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## Fostering Leadership in High School Female Athletes Through Sports Psychology and Goal Setting

Leadership is a term that is frequently used in the educational world and is a principle that is integral to the development of successful student-athletes. Leadership qualities of student-athletes may include: character, integrity, confidence, self-motivation, positive attitude towards self, teammates, and coaches, and the desire to improve one's abilities (Hillier, 2015).

Leadership traits are observed and fostered by the adults, who are relevant stakeholders in the student-athletes' success, which include coaches, teachers, counselors, parents, and community members. These adults may perceive the student-athlete as a role model. Developing these student-athletes leadership skills can benefit the school community in a number of ways by reinforcing the educational mission and values that are integral to the success of high school sports programs (Maher, 2005).

Leadership is a quality emphasized through high school athletics and encompasses a person's capacity to guide others in a positive manner. Researchers contend that involvement in sports can promote leadership and have a positive influence on adolescent success by developing character, commitment, fostering team dynamics, and teaching valuable life skills that produce healthy and well-rounded adults (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). For some student-athletes, leadership is intrinsic, and these student-athletes are referred to as natural leaders by invested stakeholders.

Natural leaders are often referred to as captains in team sports, and show qualities that reinforce the goals and behaviors of the coach and the athletic program. The responsibilities of a captain include being a positive role model, encouraging sportsmanship, fostering relationships between teammates, mentoring younger players, and promoting team cohesion (Amorose &



Horn, 2000). Team captains need to be given the tools to effectively lead their teammates and be taught to utilize sports psychology strategies that have been shown to be successful (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014).

One way to foster leadership among athletes is to select student-athletes that exhibit leadership potential by assisting coaches in building positive team dynamics. As a captain or leader, many student-athletes are unclear how to fulfill the role. A captain is expected to have integrity, be a positive team member, build relationships, be a role model in and out of class, and support the mission of the coach and/or school. If the captain does not promote the goals of the team, that can lead to very destructive behaviors, including undermining the coach or team mission, entitlement and selfishness, and exclusion of teammates. This may negatively impact the whole school community by creating divisiveness among teammates and invested stakeholders (Amorose & Horn, 2000).

Sports take a prominent role in the lives of high school adolescents and for many, sports becomes an integral part of the student's identity. Involvement in high school sports has been shown to facilitate the mastery of developmental tasks (life-skills) and promote healthy prosocial development of student-athletes that is applicable in the world outside of the sports realm (Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007). Studies indicate that females who participate in high school sports show more favorable outcomes compared to other youth, male and female, that do not participate in athletics (Agans & Geldhof, 2012). Though experts agree that sports participation has numerous benefits, there is a lack of empirical evidence that participation alone guarantees success, and participation may impede certain psychosocial aspects of development without a clear understanding of the traits of leadership expected in athletics (Brunelle et al., 2007). There is extensive data on the benefits of sports participation for both males and females

but there appears to be differences in how the two respond to challenges within the team dynamic (Brunelle et al., 2007).

The majority of student-athletes face challenges impacting their experiences in high school sports. Female athletes experience problems related to both social and psychological influences and females are more likely to leave a sport before their male counterparts (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). Frequent issues reported by female athletes include psychosocial dimensions relating to performance and leadership: stress and anxiety, relationships with teammates and coaches, academic challenges, poor leadership from teammates and/or coaches, and a lack of self-awareness of one's potential (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). Gilbert and Lewis (2015) suggest that females who stay involved with sports throughout high school show increased self-esteem, academic success, and a healthier psyche than females who are not involved in athletics. How to foster the potential of female team leaders for greater success and enjoyment of the athlete's high school sports experience will be the focal point of this project.

### **Description of Need**

The demands on student-athletes warrant a closer examination of factors that lead to success. Adolescence is a crucial time of brain development as teens learn to balance academics, social life, and involvement in sports. The high school athlete juggles many roles and has increased pressures to be successful academically and athletically by coaches, teachers, parents, and peers (Brunelle et al., 2007). Some of these pressures may negatively impact the athlete to the point of decreased performance and/or quitting the sport. Understanding the role that psychology plays in the success of an athlete may be the key to retaining female athlete's participation throughout high school. The high school sports environment becomes an important training ground for adolescent development with consideration of the value of psychoeducational

strategies that prove highly effective for female athletes (Brunelle et al., 2007). Fostering leadership potential of the student-athletes becomes a focal point for educators, counselors, coaches and families within the sub-culture of high school sports and in the larger context in academics.

Kendellen and Camire (2015) contend that sports have become the most popular organized activity for youth today. Therefore ensuring positive outcomes for student-athletes becomes essential for all invested parties at the high school level. Involvement in youth sports helps to develop athletic skills, teamwork, problem solving, life skills, and increases self-esteem (Brunelle et al., 2007; Holt & Neely, 2011). Advocates for participation in youth sports note an additional increase in positive benefits for female athletes including increased graduation rates, higher GPAs, significantly lower teen pregnancy rates, and decreased involvement in drugs and alcohol (Harmon, 2012).

According to the National Federation of State High School Associations [NFHSA], nearly 7.6 million high school students, grades 9-12, participate in sports (Lumpkin & Favor, 2012). With nearly 55.5% of all high school students involved in athletics, one should not be surprised that sports have become an integral part of the American culture (Koebler, 2011). On a more local level, the Juneau School District high school enrollment for the 2014-2015 school year includes approximately 1,331 high school students, 655 attending Juneau Douglas High School, and 676 attending Thunder Mountain High School (ADEED, 2015). Of these students, 522 females were involved in high school athletics, approximately 39% participation for the 2014-2015 school year. During this same year there were 568 males involved in high school sports, which is approximately 43% of the overall high school population (ADEED, 2015).

According to the Women's Sports Foundation, about two in five females participate in high school sports nationally (Dusenbery & Lee, 2015). The numbers for female involvement in sports has increased by nearly 25% since 1972 in part due to Title IX, a law implemented to promote equality in high school and college athletics (Dusenbery & Lee, 2015). Though involvement and participation has increased overall, females are 25% more likely to quit a sport as they enter high school (Gould, 2013), and tend to leave sports for factors relating to the psychology of sports (Kendellen & Camire, 2011).

Involvement in sports has been shown to create opportunities that lead beyond high school into a career path. EY Women Athletics and ESPNW conducted a survey to determine the correlation between women, sports, and leadership potential in the business world (Moses, 2015). Of the 400 businesses surveyed, 66% stated that female athletes make excellent candidates for jobs because of their work ethic, determination, and ability to work with a team; and 75% stated that competitiveness is viewed as an asset to leadership in the workplace (Moses, 2015). The retention of female athletes is important to the development of skills that lead beyond high school. Quality leadership development in high school athletics has benefits that may lead to a fulfilling career.

### **The Need for Leadership Development**

Though involvement in high school athletics has increased consecutively for the last 26 years, female athletes tend to leave competitive sports their junior and senior years in high school (Holt & Neely, 2011). Leadership programs focused on the retention of the student-athletes have not increased to match an increase in youth involvement in athletics (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). Programs to develop leadership, increase performance, and promote positive sports psychology techniques are rapidly growing at the collegiate level and show great success with female

athletes (Holt & Neely, 2011). Researchers suggest that there is an area of need for sports psychology programs at the high school level to help retain student-athletes (Gould, 2013). Much of the research that discusses factors relating to the success or failure of the female athlete are conducted at the collegiate level and lead back to the importance of quality leadership from the captains and/or the coaches (Gould, 2013).

The high school sports environment becomes much more competitive and may influence the success or failure of a student-athlete. Competing can create positive and negative stressors that influence the psychology of a student-athlete, and may appear different for male and female participants. For example, involvement in sports at the high school level for females is shown to increase self-esteem, foster sportsmanship, and increase the development of leadership qualities (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Despite the positive statistics, many female athletes struggle within the team structure and report greater dissatisfaction in team sports than their male counterparts (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Quality leadership is a key factor in success of a quality team sport experience (Gould, 2013). Regardless of the struggles, female athletes report better mental health and academic outcomes, better interpersonal relationships, and more confidence when compared to female peers uninvolved in sports (Brunelle et al., 2007).

Student-athletes cope with numerous influences that affect their cognitive, social-emotional, educational, and moral ideals (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). For example, success is often measured by winning and playing at a competitive level, both as an individual and as a part of a team. Weissman (2005) contends that emphasizing sports psychology techniques within the high school setting could help improve the student-athletes' performance in the social, behavioral, academic, and cognitive domains. For example, a student-athlete could benefit from sports psychology skills like goal setting to improve free throw shooting, or

problem solving to enhance teamwork. Sports psychology skills include positive thinking and goal setting strategies that are not just important for sports, but can and should be used in all aspects of life (Gould, Chung, Smith, & White, 2006). For both genders, success is influenced by relationships between teammates and positive relationships with coaches.

As stated previously, by high school a disproportionate amount of females, nearly two times that of males, drop out of sports nationwide (Women's Sports Foundation, 2015). The Juneau School District has slightly higher participation in sports and activities, but when comparing sports that have both a male and female team, like basketball or soccer, the numbers decrease for female participants and more closely aligned with the national statistics in dropout rates. According to the Women's Sport Foundation (2015) founded by Billie Jean King, some of the leading factors of female sports drop outs include: a decreased quality of experience, lack of positive role models on their teams, and social stigmas. According to S. Wagner, who works for the Alaska School Activities Association (personal communication, May 10, 2015), girls in the Juneau School District quit sports and activities for the following reasons: conflict with other players, conflict with leaders or captains, conflict with coaches, and negative perception of ability.

These local findings parallel national statistics in regards to reasons athletes quit competitive sports. In a study conducted by Kendellen and Camire (2015), fourteen former high school athletes ages 18-28, seven female and seven male, were interviewed about their former high school sport participation. Kendellen and Camire (2015) found that athletes reported both positive and negative feelings relating to their experience in team sports. Two main findings were discovered, participants believed that high school sports allowed them to acquire new positive life skills, and secondly, the negative experiences were surrounded by an aggressive

subculture within the high school team dynamic (Kendellen & Camire, 2015). Kendellen and Camire (2015) contend that there is a strongly held belief in western countries that sports contribute positively to the development of youth but there is a growing body of research that suggests experiences vary depending on factors relating to anxiety, aggression, and relationships within the team experience.

### **Introduction of Research Question**

Despite the national trends that show increased involvement among female athletes, there are still far fewer females participating in sports at the high school and college level - nearly 1.3 million less than that of their male counterpart (Dusenbery & Lee, 2015). Given that numerous studies show positive outcomes for female involvement in sports, the question becomes how to nurture the potential of the female athlete's psychosocial development to optimize athletic success (Kendellen & Camire, 2015).

This research project will seek to answer the following questions: What do high school counselors, coaches, teachers, and important stakeholders need to know to build the qualities of a female team leader? In what ways may the development of a psychoeducational group curriculum foster the leadership potential of female athletes? The project seeks to develop a psychoeducational curriculum that will foster leadership among team captains, and maximize potential of female athletes at the competitive high school level through goal setting. The project will examine relevant research, review the literature, examine and develop curriculum for a short-term, psychoeducational, goal oriented group experience, focusing on developing positive leadership and life skills through sports psychology strategies with the hope of keeping females competing in sports through their high school years.

Female student-athletes participate in pre-season workouts to determine who will become the starters for each team. Some coaches choose captains at the on-set of the season, while some coaches choose captains during pre-season. For many young women, leadership roles are challenging and prove a difficult role to play. There is a general feeling of ambiguity as to the role of captain as it is not often modeled or taught by coaches. When given a leadership role by a coach, the expectations for the athlete should be clearly articulated and agreed upon by both coach and the player. The athlete should be given an opportunity to explore their motivations, their strengths, weaknesses, and stressors (Weinburg & Gould, 2011).

Given the national trend of declining participation in competitive sports among high school females, there is a need to examine successful programs that will develop leadership skills to keep female athletes involved in sports (Weinburg & Gould, 2011). While there are numerous programs developed to help the student-athlete with performance and leadership for college athletes, there are few programs specifically focus on fostering success for the high school athlete. The aforementioned benefits of continued participation in sports become the foundation with which to keep girls involved (Weissman, 2005).

In Alaska, coaches are required to attain certification through the Alaska School Activities Association (ASAA) (2014), which regulates high school interscholastic activities. For team sports and activities, creating cohesion and good communication among team members, whether for swimming, volleyball, basketball, soccer, tennis, robotics, or Student Council, is key (Harmon, 2012). To excel, team leaders need to feel confident about their own roles as well as their contributions to the team.

Juneau has ASAA approved programs that encourage leadership such as *Coaching Boys to Men*, for high school boys basketball which focuses on building respect, and *Girls on the Run*,



for middle school girl runners that builds self esteem and confidence through mentoring, however, there are no programs that focus on building leadership skills for female athletes at the high school level (Phu, 2015). Many of the programs for athletes (and coaches) relate to concussion awareness, drug and alcohol use, first aid, and sports medicine, but there are no target programs focusing on the psychology of leadership for athletes. Guidelines to help coaches foster leadership among the athletes chosen to these important positions are also non-existent (Voelker, 2012). The development of sports psychology programs at the high school level may be the missing link and key to successful outcomes.

### **Literature Review**

There are numerous factors that contribute to youth leaving competitive sports including increasing costs to families and communities as districts are cutting athletic programs and replacing them with test prep programs (Brown, 2009). According to a national study on budget cuts, over \$2 billion in cuts to school-based sports and physical education programs are contributing to a range of problems afflicting the nation's youth, including academic failure, obesity, and increased violence (Brown, 2009). The potential risks of the financial cuts to programs will be an increase in other issues potentially including increased drop out rates, lower GPAs, and an increase in teen pregnancy in females. Creating educational programs that increase and retain participation in sports at the high school level is beneficial at all levels of society (Hillier, 2015).

A key component of a successful team experience is how leadership is fostered. If a team has quality leadership modeled by coaches and team leaders (captains), the teams have more successful outcomes (Holt & Neely, 2011). Quality leadership from coaches and captains includes making an effort to connect with the players through team bonding activities, goal

setting, positive reinforcement, task-oriented skills that emphasize team cohesion, and shared commitment and responsibility (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). Trottier and Robitaille (2014) surveyed 24 coaches regarding the main skills they fostered among their athletes. All coaches reported using a holistic, athlete-centered approach that emphasized the athlete's needs and the coaches' values (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). At the top of the skills were self-confidence and respect; at the bottom were leadership and teamwork. Lack of leadership, and an inadequate understanding of how to effectively be a team leader are key reasons that female athletes report quitting their sport (Dusenbery & Lee, 2015). Developing a curriculum for a psychoeducational group that emphasizes the development of leadership skills and personal goal setting may help to create a school culture in which female student-athletes thrive in competitive sports.

As much as youth sport is central in the lives of millions of young people, there is growing concern and awareness of the risks for female student-athletes who quit sports. Female athletes have cited increased anxiety, aggression from teammates, and poor relationships with coaches as leading causes for leaving competitive sports (Kendellen & Camire, 2015). Adults who tend to influence this stress in positive and negative ways include teachers, counselors, parents, and coaches. Coaches in particular play a critical role in the success of female athletes at the high school level and have a significant influence on the overall psychology of student-athletes. Studies suggest that coaches who implement positive sports psychology strategies that foster the development of life skills through a holistic athlete-centered approach turn out students that prove much more successful academically, socially, and athletically (Kendellen & Camire, 2015; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Positive coaching and fostering a sense of belonging among and between team members has shown increased success at all levels of sports from amateur to professional (Gould et al., 2006).

Research contends that fostering sports psychology skills can transcend the high school classroom to benefit female athletes in other aspects of life (Gould, 2013). According to Maher (2005), sports psychology can be described as a theoretical framework that includes psychoeducational goals for athletes in the physical, mental, and social emotional domains. In the past decade sports psychology has been increasingly utilized at the collegiate and professional level to enhance performance and personal development with much success for athletic programs. Programs that have proven successful with college athletes warrant a closer examination of how to apply sports psychology strategies with high school athletes.

### **Athlete Types: Ego Driven vs. Task Driven**

Athletes are frequently one of two types of performers: ego driven (extrinsic), or task driven (intrinsic). An ego driven athlete is often focused on one's own success or failure, and when not performing well, becomes discouraged easily, may be difficult to coach, and less focused on the success of the team (Jacobs, Masson, & Havill, 2006). The ego driven athletes enjoy the social prestige and motivation and are frequently individually focused rather than team focused (Walker, 2010). The task driven, or intrinsically motivated athlete, does not give up easily, is team focused, goal focused, and bounces back from defeat well. Task oriented athletes, are viewed as coachable, and take constructive criticism well (Jacobs et al., 2006). Athletes who are ego-driven, benefit from positive reinforcement, and the cognitive strategies that help foster team cohesion (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2014).

It has been observed by sports counselors, teachers, and coaches of female student-athletes that teams show greater success when they are task-oriented rather than ego-focused, or driven by individual accomplishments of one member of the team (Gould, 2013). Frequently, the top athlete becomes the captain because of their athletic skills, which are not always

synonymous with leadership skills (Gould, 2013). Often times, the top athlete is ego-driven and success or failure of the team lies heavily upon the top athlete performing at their peak performance, thus creating a pressure filled environment that focuses less on fostering the potential of team, and more on the performance of the top athlete. This proves challenging for many teams that have talent but lack cohesion. Without team cohesion, struggles may occur that impede success.

Teams that emphasize positive team dynamics, trust, and goal setting are more cohesive and perform better (Gould, 2013). An approach of using positive psychology strategies, setting short term attainable goals, short term solutions, and working on changing negative thinking can be effectively implemented in a small, task oriented group setting focusing on leadership skills and goal setting that aim to encourage positive team dynamics and increasing performance (Corey et al., 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Every athlete struggles or faces challenges in their respective sport. These issues could range from missing free throws to difficulty communicating with teammates. Studies indicate that participating in a psychoeducational group specific to athlete's needs and skill sets can provide a place to discuss those challenges with like-minded athletes (Lochary, 2014).

Competitive athletes are motivated to make improvements and changes to increase performance and success (Lochary, 2014). Creating a group experience helps students apply the lessons learned in sports to their personal lives and has been effective and rewarding for participants (Lochary, 2014). Creating an effective group may help form the positive identity of the female athlete, and provide the athlete tools for success on their teams, and in their academic pursuits (Gould, 2013). Groups in the school setting are generally psychoeducational and short-term,

structured, problem focused, homogenous in nature, and utilize cognitive theories for its members (Corey et al., 2014). Psychoeducational groups are designed to help participants develop skills for coping with challenges that life presents them and are highly adaptable in a school setting (Jones & Robinson III, 2000).

Corey et al. (2014) contend that group counseling lends itself to the school environment very well. Group counseling is effective with diverse populations, including student-athletes. Counselors must recognize that each theory has its strengths and weaknesses, and each theoretical practice provides unique contributions; there is no one size fits all approach. Corey et al. (2014) suggest that a holistic counselor utilize theories as a roadmap for reaching the student's fullest potential. When working with a sub-group of high school students, particularly high school athletes, an integrated approach is recommended due to the diverse nature of each sport and athlete's experience. The counselor should help to create an authentic approach and develop an authentic relationship to assist in reaching the fullest potential of the student-athlete (Corey et al., 2014).

Developing a theoretical framework helps to guide the counselor in navigating the dynamics of working with and among group members. Corey et al. (2014) suggest creating a fluid plan based on a theoretical approach or approaches that give direction and focus to group development yet allows for the counselor to integrate theories individually to help achieve the goals outlined by the group members. Corey et al. (2014) suggest the counselor utilizes an integrated approach that emphasizes the role of thinking, feeling, and the actions of human behavior. High school athletes are at a stage of development where their cognitive functions are often in conflict with success outcomes. For example, a student athlete may have the physical talent to excel but negative thinking about her sport may hold her back from reaching her fullest

potential. An approach that focuses on the potential of the individual athlete provides the counselor flexibility to work with diverse populations.

Several theories are important to consider when discussing the topic of leadership and potential among female-athletes. The postmodern approach of Solution Focused Behavior Therapy (SFBT) stresses tapping into existing resources to change within the individual, the cognitive behavioral approach of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) stresses the role of thinking and doing and is more action oriented, and the Person Centered approach stresses the belief in maximizing the growth potential of each person by focusing on the positive aspects of self and helping the person to set goals to reach their fullest potential (Corey et al., 2014). Person Centered, or positive psychology, empowers the individual to believe that one's potential is within their control and can be nurtured to achieve personal goals for themselves (Corey et al., 2014). Each of these approaches has been shown to be effective when fostering potential among high school female athletes (Harmon, 2012).

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) emphasizes the role of the individual in setting and attaining goals for success (Corey et al., 2014). Rather than focusing solely on problems the athlete is experiencing, the counselor will collaborate with the athlete to improve performance outcomes through positive reinforcement. The relationship between the counselor and the athlete is critical in SFBT. This approach nurtures mutual respect, develops empathy among group members, and fosters open and authentic dialogue by using questioning interventions that help the athlete become solution focused rather than problem focused (Corey et al., 2014). A therapeutic goal of SFBT emphasizes the relationships between the counselor, the group members and the individual.

Group members, in this case the athletes, are the primary interpreters of their own experiences and thus are the experts of their own lives (Corey et al., 2014). Adolescence is a time of self-discovery, forming an identity and taking on roles, and SFBT compliments this stage of development. Group members and the leader establish realistic, clear and meaningful goals that guide the group process. Short-term attainable goals can be framed in the context of SMART goals commonly used in the educational setting (Holmes, 2016). The SMART goal process is a simple strategy that utilizes the acronym: S-specific, M-measurable, A-achievable, R-relevant, T-timely, to help the athlete achieve measurable success (Holmes, 2016). SFBT works with diverse populations, is collaborative in nature, and works well within the school setting by utilizing the concept of homework, authentic relationships, and goal setting (Corey et al., 2014).

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) is a cognitive behavior based approach that is structured and focused on changing cognitions to produce desired changes among group members (Corey et al., 2014). This approach emphasizes a collaborative relationship among the group members and the counselor, and is a present-focused, psychoeducational model for achieving short-term goals. This cognitive model draws from a variety of techniques and encourages targeting specific problems to bring about change. In REBT groups, the faulty thinking is confronted while reinforcing the unconditional acceptance of the group member's self-worth.

The strength of this approach is its effectiveness in identifying that thoughts cause feelings, both positive and negative, and to help individuals focus on changing their feelings by looking at what they are telling themselves, referred to as self-talk (Jacobs, et al., 2006). Another benefit of REBT is the empowerment this model provides because the technique encourages the individual to have control over the thoughts that cause the feelings, rather than letting the

feelings control the behaviors and create irrational thoughts which thus influence performance (Jacobs et al., 2006). REBT is action oriented and places the emphasis on the ability of the individual to take control of one's negative thinking and take action to change it (Corey et al., 2014). An example to consider is the athlete who struggles with free throws and has shown anxiety and decreased performance. REBT can assist the athlete in working through the mental struggles that are influencing the decrease in performance.

The Person Centered approach focuses on one's potential and reinforces the concept of unconditional positive regard for each client/student. This approach applies well when working with female athletes who excel at positive reinforcement of skills and tasks (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). The person-centered approach is based on the assumption that the individual has the capacity to identify and understand problems and fosters the belief that the individual has the resources within themselves to change and improve (Corey et al., 2014). The function of the school counselor in a psychoeducational setting is to be understanding, compassionate, supportive, and accepting, and to assist the student to set attainable goals for success (Corey et al., 2014). Developing a curriculum that will help student-athletes achieve success by fostering their potential, supporting them through their trials and tribulations, and helping to navigate through the emotional highs and lows of competing in high school sports, lends itself to person-centered principles. The person-centered approach, based on the theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, focuses on people's ability to direct their own lives and the achievement of one's fullest potential, commonly referred to as positive psychology (Elmhorst, Minter, & Spilis, 2015).

Corey et al. (2014) state that every theoretical approach has strengths and weaknesses, and provides unique contributions. SFBT and REBT are easily adaptable to the high school



setting because they are student centered, short-term, goal oriented, and focus on the present that applies well to each sports season. The person-centered approach utilizes the principles of unconditional positive regard and focuses on relationship building that is key to successful team dynamics. These approaches rely on relationship building, creating a caring and trusting environment, do not depend on diagnoses or treatment, and can be adapted to a variety of school schedules and settings (Corey et al., 2014).

Development of curriculum for a psychoeducational group with high school female athletes, using an integrated approach that includes sports psychology strategies, SMART goals, the SFBT model, the REBT model, and the Person Centered approach (positive psychology) may work well with this cross section of adolescent athletes and leaders. Using an integrated approach in a psychoeducational group gives the facilitator and participants a variety of techniques focused on short-term solution focused results for positive change (Pichot & Dolan, 2013).

In a study done by Gould (2013), it was revealed that coaches who implemented athlete centered sports psychology techniques and were focused on transferring life skills into their sports were much more successful than those that excluded the psychological strategies. Gould, a sports psychologist, works with coaches and competitive athletes across the country in developing and implementing psychoeducational curriculum to promote personal goal setting, create team cohesion, build leadership skills, examine weak points in coach-player dynamics, and examining common issues that competitive athletes face when participating in sports (Gould et al., 2006).

Gould et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of fostering personal and social development that promotes leadership and success for athletes. Furthermore, the focus on skill

instruction, injury prevention, and performance enhancement, while excluding positive sports psychology techniques is a key factor in females leaving competitive sports. Gould and colleagues (2006) surveyed 154 varsity high school sports coaches from North Carolina regarding whether athletes learned positive life skills and values from playing sports. They were instructed to rank their objectives of coaching, on a 1-4 Likert scale, regarding how success was measured for their teams.

The study found that coaches ranked social and psychological development of athletes as a top priority, followed by the development of physical and athletic skills (Gould et al., 2006). These coaches agreed that teamwork, goal setting, and the value of hard work are developed through participation in sports. Gould stresses the importance of educational training for coaches to be effective leaders, and to effectively foster leadership in athletes (Gould et al., 2006). Table 1 shows the coaches reported benefits from sports participation in the Gould et al. (2006) study.

Table 1. Ratings of Character Benefits of High School Sports

<u>Categories</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Teamwork	3.67	.61
Value of hard work	3.44	.69
Time Management	3.38	.65
Goal setting	3.35	.68
Citizenship/abiding by the rule of society	3.32	.69
Motivation for sport	3.29	.67
Respect for self	3.28	.65
Self-control	3.23	.67
How to compete cleanly and fairly	3.21	.67
Respect for others		
Winning gracefully	3.20	.70
Fairness	3.11	.62
Accepting defeat gracefully	3.06	.56
Not holding grudges	3.04	.66
	2.89	.69

*Note: Ratings were made on a 4-point scale (1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree) (Gould et al., 2006)*

The coaches were also asked about problems they observed athletes experience while participating in sports. Coaches reported issues including poor work ethic, lack of motivation, failure to take responsibility, lack of teamwork, and poor grades as the most significant problems (Gould et al., 2006). Additional findings showed there were no significant differences between coaches of males versus females regarding the role of character development, however, significant differences were found between the problems that male and female athletes face (Gould et al., 2006). Notable differences included a much lower rate of tobacco and recreational drug or alcohol use among the female athletes, though significantly higher rates of sexual harassment and bullying were experienced.

These findings suggest that more emphasis be placed on how to teach student-athletes problem solving strategies, goals setting strategies and motivation strategies (Gould et al., 2006). Coaches are in need of support to meet the needs of today's student-athletes, and Gould (2013) suggests additional research and programs should be developed to help schools achieve success for high school sports programs.

Concern for the healthy psychology of the athlete has become as emphasized as the athletic skill itself and more in line with the psychoeducational approach to coaching and teaching the whole student-athlete (Voelker, 2012). The modern coaching philosophy uses strategies to build self-esteem, positive teamwork, group cohesion, and emphasizes following concussion protocols. Gould et al. (2006) found that high school coaches that place a greater emphasis on the personal development of athletes, and foster psychological and social development skills had greater success and outcomes for their athletes and the team experience. It is important to note that some coaches may believe that participation in sports alone will develop life skills and leadership, so an emphasis should be placed upon establishing norms,

providing training for coaches, and developing sports psychology strategies into the school setting in a systematic and structured way (Gould et al., 2006).

### **Discussion of Programs: UNIFORM, GOAL, and SUPER**

There are several programs that target positive youth development in the community setting and experts argue there needs to be additional sports based intervention to teach life skills in a meaningful and deliberate manner (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). The UNIFORM program is a newly established program that uses sport based life-skills as a medium to create positive change in youth (Brunelle et al., 2007), In 2002, Danish and his colleagues developed the program GOAL, Going for the Goal (Danish, 2002a) and SUPER, Sport United to Promote Education and Recreation (Danish, 2002b) that emphasized teaching about goals, the goal setting process, and strategies to help adolescents overcome obstacles to success. In a coordinated effort, GOAL and SUPER combined sports psychology strategies with goal setting to begin to address the changing needs of this generation's student-athlete (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015).

Weissman (2005) applied the strategies of GOAL and SUPER to create a year-long sports psychology psychoeducational curriculum to address the psychosocial needs of the high school athlete, and may be the first program to be documented on a national level. Weissman collaborated with invested stakeholders including the athletic directors, parents, coaches, and student-athletes to introduce the benefits of sports psychology programs at the high school level (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015; Weissman, 2005). Weissman (2005) contends that though there are numerous psychoeducational techniques used at the high school level, there lacks evidence that sports psychology strategies occur in a deliberate manner and suggests there is a need for programs to be implemented in a systematic way.

The UNIFORM program utilizes sports psychology with high school athletes by capitalizing on the use of meaningful sport terms, i.e., comparing the team uniform that a student-athlete wears to a psychological uniform an athlete wears (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). It has been recognized that fostering life skills and goal setting strategies with athletes improves performance in the classroom and on the court (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). UNIFORM is an acronym for seven skills for student athletes to implement to improve and increase performance: (U) use goal setting; (N) no mistakes, only learning opportunities; (I) the use of imagery; (F) full focus on the task; (O) overtly positive reinforcement and self-talk; (R) relaxation techniques, and; (M) the use of making routines for the tasks related to success in sports (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015; Johnson & Gilbert, 2004).

The UNIFORM program cites the links between positive performance in sports translating to improved academic performance (Johnson & Gilbert, 2004). These strategies are useful for building leadership skills among competitive female athletes because of the effectiveness of goal setting, positive self-talk, and strategies to help build team dynamics. Weissman's study documented the athletes' concepts pre and post implementation over the 12-week program with 138 student-athletes (113=male, 25=female) from a high school in California (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). Participant ages ranged from 14-18 and included male and female basketball players who had never previously participated in sports psychology programs (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). In collaboration with the coaches, the program collected pretest and posttest data from the athletes regarding the usefulness of the sports psychology strategies on their sports and academic success. The athletes reported that the UNIFORM strategies including visualization, positive self-talk, and goal setting were particularly helpful for success in their respective sports and noted overall improvement (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015).

The first two weeks of the program focuses on introducing the student-athlete to sports psychology, and provides concrete examples of how the strategies can be beneficial to them in the sport, in school, and in other aspects of life (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). Each week a new UNIFORM skill was introduced to group participants, who were put into teams for the duration of the 12 weeks. The student-athletes were encouraged to sit together in class, do activities together, and reinforce the UNIFORM strategies with each other for accountability and mastery of the skills (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015; Weissman, 2005). During the 12 weeks key sports concepts were implemented through the use of sport terminology: Practice, Drills, Chalk Talk, Films, and Playbooks, were both behavioral and cognitive strategies to help the student-athlete actively gain skills that promote leadership potential and empowerment of the athlete.

Weissman (2005) targeted high school athletics in an effort to determine if positive psychology strategies would benefit high school programs at the national level. All three programs - UNIFORM, GOAL, and SUPER determined that high school athletes would greatly benefit from sports psychology interventions (Danish, 2002a; Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). UNIFORM, GOAL, and SUPER have been highly successful in the focus studies implemented in 2005, 2007, and 2012, and are gaining momentum among elite high school programs (Agans & Geldhof, 2012).

Other programs like *Get Your Head in the Game* are growing in popularity among high school and college coaches as an accessible web based sports psychology program (Brown, 2011). Brown (2011), a sports psychologist who developed the program, has books, videos, workshops and a comprehensive website that focuses on athletes performing at their peak. He suggests that performing well requires more than physical skills, but that winning takes a mental balance (Brown, 2011). *Get Your Head in the Game* is a for profit program, that is highly

successful in fostering positive outcomes of amateur as well as professional athletes, in an online format.

### **Post-Secondary Sports Psychology Programs**

Colleges and universities that have implemented positive sports counseling programs are seeing greater success of their athletes and their programs (Gould, 2013). The programs reviewed can be easily adapted to the high school setting. In order to create a successful psychoeducational model at the high school level, a counselor should develop an appropriate theoretical approach. Holding student-athletes in positive regard and helping them to reach their fullest potential can be applied through many theories in a psychoeducational group setting. Doing so may bolster the trend of increased participation of female student-athletes.

According to Voelker (2012) sports psychology is one of the fastest growing careers in the United States and Europe, due to the recognition of the value of implementing sports psychology strategies to increase success among athletes. Colleges and universities in the U.S., Canada, and Australia are implementing sports psychology curriculums for teams, coaches, and individual student-athletes that work on skills that transcend the court into the classroom (Gould, 2013). Numerous colleges and universities have sports psychologists and sports counselors on staff that work with athletes and focus on personal goal setting, coping skills, motivation strategies, leadership skills and team dynamics, and strategies to increase performance outcomes for female athletes at the competitive level (Gould, 2013; Voelker, 2012).

Despite an overall increase in female participants in sports at the high school and collegiate level, focus groups on leadership, performance improvement, and team dynamics, have not been implemented to reflect the growth in participation (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015). According to the NCAA, between 38% and 61% of Division I programs have access to sports

psychology programs. Of that percentage, all of them cited evidence that the strategies were useful to their athletes (Connole, 2013). Universities like the University of Alabama (under Nick Sabin, football), and the University of Kentucky (under John Calipari, basketball), have commented publicly about the benefits of sports psychology strategies and the related successes of their programs; both teams have competed for the national title in their respective sports. More than 30% of Division I, II, and III colleges and universities hope to implement sports psychology programs at their schools in the next five years (Connole, 2013). The schools surveyed regarding the implementation of sports psychology programs, stated that if budget were not an issue, they would implement sports psychology and sports counseling programs to educate coaches and players about positive sports psychology techniques in an attempt to keep quality athletes throughout their college career (Connole, 2013; Gould, 2013). Implementing programs that emphasize maximizing potential and increasing performance has the capacity to increase participation, improve leadership, and improve performance at the team and individual level (Gilbert & Lewis, 2015).

## **Application**

### **Intended Audience**

The intended audience is high school female athletes who are in leadership positions on their competitive athletic teams in the Juneau School District, although with slight modifications, the curriculum could work in any high school setting. The student-athletes will be invited to participate in a psychoeducational group during the school day with the school counselor. The purpose of the psychoeducational group will be to emphasize leadership, positive team dynamics, goal setting, and positive psychology strategies to increase performance and enjoyment in high school competitive sports.



Using a holistic and integrated approach, group goals will include fostering positive relationships with coaches and teammates, group cohesion, positive cognitive skills for sports and academics, developing goal setting, and maintaining high achievement and decreasing anxiety (Perrone & Sedlacek, 2000). Another goal of the group will be to help female student-athletes compete to their fullest potential, using short-term solution focused goal setting, targeting team chemistry, problem solving, group cohesion strategies, and understanding task-oriented versus an ego oriented approach to athletics.

The created curriculum (See Appendix A) outlines how to create a psychoeducational, task-oriented group at the high school level, focusing on positive team dynamics, improving performance through the cognitive behavioral approach, promoting positive thinking through the Person Centered approach, and implementing strategies used in Solution Focused Behavior Therapy (SFBT) and REBT (Pichot & Dolan, 2013). The curriculum will be utilized with female athletes in the Juneau School District under the direction of the school counselor, and with permission from the Athletic Directors and the Principals of the high schools, as well as family members.

The curriculum will be available to assist coaches, counselors, and teams in developing positive group dynamics, leadership, and positive sports psychology techniques that include goal setting and visualization of performance. The group curriculum will span eight-weeks and will focus on specific topics based on the research of best practices in programming for female high school athletes:

Goal Setting for Peak Performance

Ego Driven versus Task Oriented Athletes

Positive Psychology Strategies

Team Dynamics, how to be a Leader and a Good Teammate

Visualization and Imagery

Favoritism, Motivation and Stress/Burnout

### **Group Development**

Developing a group for high school athletes requires that the theories utilized be appropriate for the high school population. A key component to a successful group experience among high school athletes is relationship development. The primary function of the counselor is to create an authentic and accepting climate for student-athletes to express themselves in a genuine and natural way (Corey et al., 2014).

The group format lends itself to efficiently working with teams and individuals within the confines of the school day. Many of the female athletes experience their stressors during pre-season, and as the season progresses having a timely group may show greater outcomes when dealing with issues of leadership while the conflict or stress arises (Corey et al., 2014). Short-term solution focused groups are effective for athletes in team sports since their lens is often the current sport they are in, and a group format can help to connect them with their peers, resolve conflicts in the here and now, and give athletes strategies to cope with the stress of participation in competitive sports, foster leadership, and increase team cohesion within the group (Kendellen & Camire, 2011).

REBT, SFBT, and Person Centered approaches encourage positive relationships between the group leader and group members, foster empathy and compassion among group members, and encourage a clarification of the causes of the negative self-talk and fosters a more positive sense of self (Corey et al., 2014). Development of these life skills may improve the athletes' performance both athletically and academically, and help to foster group cohesion.

The group would be built into the academic schedule, such as an advisory that meets twice weekly for 45-60-minute increments in an assigned classroom at the high school. If a school does not have an option such as this, the group could potentially meet during lunch, before/after practice, or during a study hall. Upon review of the recommendations, each female leader will be personally invited, and screened by adults for their leadership potential. According to Corey et al. (2014), the ideal group size is between 6-8 students. The group will be opened up to female student leaders in other extra curricular activities if initial enrollment is low.

Prior to meeting with the student-athletes, the facilitator would meet with the principal, athletic director, parents, and coaches addressing the need for a psychoeducational group that focuses on the principles of positive psychology and parallels the philosophy and principles outlined by the ASAA coaching classes. The facilitator will arrange an informal pre-group meeting, prepare psychologically for leadership tasks, and make provisions for evaluating the group process during and at the end of the group (Corey et al., 2014). The group could be repeated in different sports seasons as needed.

### **Conclusion**

Working with female student-athletes to promote positive self-esteem, self-awareness, and leadership skills is growing in interest in today's sport centered society. Fostering an athlete's growth potential can have lasting benefits both on and off of the field of play. Female participation in sports is shown to have greatly increased positive self awareness, lower teen pregnancy by as much as 80% in high school, and contribute to higher GPAs and overall success in high school (Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Developing a curriculum to foster potential can assist young female athletes to become task-oriented goal setters that work cohesively to promote a positive athletic climate in today's high school sports. In turn, such a program may be

effective in reducing the number of female athletes who quit sports during their high school years.

Fostering leadership in high school athletes has benefits that transcend the high school to the larger society. Developing life skills that include goal setting, leadership potential, increased self-esteem, and teamwork are skills that employers desire in potential employees, and that coaches' desire of their athletes. Quality leadership is the keystone to success of the female athlete. Though there is a lack of longitudinal studies at the high school level, the success of collegiate programs that emphasize leadership warrant closer examination. Implementation of programs that will assist high school female athletes to reach their maximum potential as students, and as athletes, have benefits that may last a lifetime (Gould, 2013).

The development and implementation of an effective curriculum focusing on the growth potential of female athletes can lead to positive outcomes for all who are invested in developing female athletes. Developing curriculum that can be imbedded into the school day for high school athletes is cost effective in a budget conscious society. Recognizing that there are numerous factors that lead to the success or failure of a student-athlete, it may be beneficial to examine the role of the coach in fostering the potential of student-athletes. Giving female-athletes concrete skills for success may empower them to advocate for themselves in their relationships with coaches and teammates resulting in greater enjoyment and achievement in sports and in life.

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## Appendix A

### Psychoeducational Curriculum Guide for Female High School Athletes

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A working document created to assist student-athletes in the development of leadership skills and goal setting for success.  
By Gretchen O. Kriegmont



Harry How/Getty Images

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### **Psychoeducational Curriculum Guide for High School Athletes**

The following curriculum was developed for a high school advisory class with female student-athletes who are in leadership positions. The psychoeducational curriculum was designed to be taught over an 8-9 week period, in 45-60 minute sessions embedded within the school day. The school counselor may facilitate or co-facilitate 8-9 short-term, task-oriented, solution focused small groups that focus on developing leadership skills, goal setting, enhancing performance, and problem solving skills relating to participation in team sports. The lessons include activities, videos, journaling, discussions, and homework relating to sports psychology strategies. Sports psychology can be defined as an integrated science that addresses how psychological factors affect performance in sports. The goal is to assist the student-athlete to have a positive experience in their respective sports.

The groups may be repeated up to three times per year with different groups. Groups may be gender specific, and are designed for 6-8 participants over a 7-9 week period. Each session will include activities and homework that are focused on goal setting, problem solving, and leadership development. Sports psychology strategies will be utilized in addition to the theories of Solution Focused Behavior Therapy, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, and Person Centered therapy approaches to increase performance and enjoyment in competitive sports at the high school level.

The following pages provide an overview of the group process over the eight weeks, the theoretical framework and expectations of group experience, and fluid lessons for each of the sessions. Establishing the focus and purpose of the group, developing group norms, reviewing safety and confidentiality, and outlining the goals of the sessions is recommended to be established in the initial stages of group.

## **Group Overview and Theoretical Approach**

### **Initial Stages of Group**

The characteristics of the initial stages of group are an orientation and exploration for members and the leader. Day 1 of the group is a pre-group session with the facilitator outlining the expectations and procedures of the group, discussing and establishing norms and determining if the group members want to participate. The facilitator will discuss the function of the leader and the function of group participants. During this first group session the members will be getting acquainted. The pre-group stage will discuss how the group functions, the spoken and unspoken norms that will govern group behaviors, explore fears and hopes pertaining to the group, and explore hesitations and issues of safety.

The pre-group sessions would screen invited group members using the following questions: “What are your expectations for this group experience?” and “Why is it important for a team leader to make sure all members of the team are included?” Confidentiality is established as an important component for group participation, and gives the student-athlete a chance to clarify questions, and address any initial anxieties, worries, and fears. Group goals should be established in the first session and revisited during the second group session to clearly define the norms.

During the second group, athletes would be asked to set a goal for themselves as a team leader and member of the team, and as an individual on their teams. The initial goals will be revisited in each stage of group to reflect upon the growth of each participant. The group goals will be posted on big butcher paper and posted during each group as a reminder of the group focus. At the end of the second group, student-athletes would be given a short homework assignment to address one concern relating to their role as a group leader or team captain.

Helping members define their personal goals will be emphasized in the initial stages of group. Corey et al. (2014) suggest the following model be utilized:

- Find better ways to resolve problems with teammates and coaches
- Become more honest and open with teammates when conflicts arise
- Learn how to set personal goals to be a better teammate
- Increase awareness of what type of athlete you are, either task oriented, or ego driven and how that may impact the athlete's performance

The facilitator will assist members in establishing personal goals and team goals using components of Solution Focused Brief Therapy [SFBT], UNIFORM strategies, and the Person Centered approach. In the initial stage of group confidentiality will be explored and the fact that the group will be discussing issues that may manifest themselves at practice. However, any issues brought forth should be discussed within the confines of the group, and group members must protect the confidentiality of each other to truly grow as a group.

At the end of the first group, writing prompts and journaling will be provided as “homework” for group members to answer, having the knowledge that the writing will be addressed during the following group. Each session of group will include journaling and writing prompts. Corey et al. (2014) suggests journaling with writing prompts as a way to foster trust in a new group. (see attached worksheets).

The initial stage will include discussion in partner groups as well as with the group as a whole. This can foster trust and help the reluctant participants feel less reserved to share (Corey et al., 2014). It will be crucial to address conflicts early in a non-threatening, non-defensive manner. If early conflicts are not addressed it has the potential to disrupt group cohesion in the transition and later stages of group.

Explicit and implicit norms will be discussed and posted for the group members to see. Some group members may believe that they have to reveal everything at group without maintaining any privacy. As the facilitator, it will be critical to establish that not everything needs to be revealed and that discussion time will be shared among group members to avoid some members monopolizing the group. Corey et al. (2014) suggest that explicit norms be established. Members are expected to attend all the sessions unless traveling. Members are encouraged to share their experiences with their teams both personally and as a part of the team, members are expected to give feedback to one another, and to focus on the here and now interactions, not what happened in seasons past (Corey et al., 2014). If group norms are clearly presented, and the members see the value of them and work cooperatively, norms can be agents of change and have positive and lasting outcomes (Corey et al., 2014).

As the group evolves it will be beneficial to devote some time to teaching members the basics of the group process and how they can contribute positively, and become active participants in the group process. Corey et al. (2014) emphasize that members will benefit from the experience in direct proportion to how much they invest of themselves in the group, and practicing what they learn in the group outside in their sport.

### **Resistance**

Resistance may come from the ego-oriented athletes who feel threatened by participating in a group. Additionally, the coaches may feel threatened by having a group that discusses the difficulties and challenges of being on a team. Some coaches have a philosophy that does not take into play the psychology of current athletes. Hopefully, the coaches will foster the positive aspects of team leadership and promote the idea of working with their athletes to build stronger team dynamics.

## **Group Cohesion**

Group cohesion will be a central focus for the psychoeducational group. Group cohesion is a sense of togetherness and belonging in a group and is paramount in the beginning and at the end. Group cohesion and newly found leadership skills are the ultimate goals for the group members to take away when working with their teammates and coaches (Corey et al., 2014). Realistically, student-athletes will bring with them issues from the past and it will be the job of the group leader to foster the here-and-now and to put the past issues or conflicts behind them in order to develop a cohesive group (Perrone & Sedlacek, 2000).

If group cohesion is established during the initial stages, it will make the middle stages of group, sessions 4-7, more productive. Group cohesion develops in the early stages of group after the norms of the group have been established. The cohesiveness of the members can provide a climate to reach a deeper level of trust and safety (Corey et al., 2014). Group cohesion fosters action in the way of self-disclosure, feedback, and willingness to participate and take risks, providing insights, and addressing conflicts.

A group's identity is shaped by the way members participate. Each group is unique and develops a fluid character or personality (Perrone & Sedlacek, 2000). As group members move through the stages the dynamics often change. The level of intimacy and commitment, and the group's cohesion and trust become evident as the group works together to create real and lasting change in their respective sports. A cohesive group will create a bond as they share their athletic experiences with one another in a safe, authentic, and trusting way (Perrone, & Sedlacek, 2000).

Group cohesion may be difficult if there are attendance issues due to travel or illness, or if the leader does not effectively foster the cohesiveness of group members. For a group to have a positive impact, group members must be committed to the norms outlined in the early phases of



group (Diefenbeck, Klemm, & Hayes, 2014). Group cohesion may prove difficult in an eight-to-nine week group because there may be a lack of commitment by all members if they do not see the need for the educational alliance (Diefenbeck et al., 2014). Therefore, the facilitator will model trust, positive regard for other members, and openly discuss roadblocks to group cohesion.

How the athletes resolve conflicts in the group setting can help them to resolve conflicts within the confines of their athletic experience. Group participants who refuse to work with conflicts, may blame others for their issues in the middle stages of group and thus the facilitator will be aware of this potential and look for cooperation among the positive group members throughout each session.

### **Final Stages of Group**

The final phase of group will be to consolidate the learning that has taken place. Realizing that reflection of goals will be addressed in each of the stages of group, the ending stage will draw upon what has been experienced, and address both the individual changes and the group changes. For some participants, the ending may bring with it anxiety. The final stage is vital for members to clarify, integrate, and evaluate the meaning of their experience (Corey et al., 2014). The ending of group should take place over two group meetings, with the last group having some ritual closure. Each participant will be asked to share their perspective with other group members to foster the lasting benefits of the experience.

Termination of the group may present behaviors from some group members that might be misinterpreted. Some group members may retreat early, and seem distant or argumentative. Because the group is eight to nine weeks, stages of group occur rapidly. Carrying the learning further will help the athletes as they move on to their next sport, or as they learn to navigate the stressors of high school in general. The final stage of group will include being reminded of

confidentiality, particularly as student-athletes will continue to be classmates and potential teammates in the future (Corey et al., 2014).

It will be important to address that one group experience will not change a person's life entirely, but athletes should take away one or two strategies that can be used to be better teammates and athletes. The experience and strategies for success can foster a healthier team experience for all of the members. As a follow up to the group experience, one strategy may be to have participants write a letter to themselves about their experience in group and the things that they hope they will not forget about their experience. This letter can be sealed and delivered to them shortly after the group to serve as a good reminder about what they accomplished and motivate them to make lasting changes (Corey et al., 2014).

## Informed Consent

**Group Membership Agreement**

- 
- I agree to commit to participating in group activities to enhance my team sport experience.
  - I understand that group is confidential and I agree to protect the confidentiality of my fellow group members.
  - I agree to work towards the goals of group and that I will hold group members in positive regard.
  - I understand that it is my responsibility to inform the group facilitator if I am unable to attend a group session.
  - I agree to complete the assignments and homework developed in group in order to achieve successful outcomes.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Parental Consent Form**

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Dear parent or guardian,

Your student-athlete has been selected to participate in an short-term group, 7-9 weeks, focused on building leadership skills, goal setting strategies, and techniques that aim to enhance performance and enjoyment of high school sports.

The sessions will be held during Advisory/Extension during the school day throughout the student's current season. Your student's confidentiality is important to the school, and participation is optional. If you and your student agree to participate, please know that group facilitators are able to discuss general components of group, but not specific to any particular student. What is discussed in the group will not be shared with coaches, or other staff, other than the general curriculum overview, unless a member discloses harm to self or others. Copies of the curriculum will be made available per request.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me through the school contact phone.

Respectfully,

School Counselor

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Please sign and return this permission slip if you would like your student to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to attend a small group during  
Advisory/Extension.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

## **Session #1 Initial Group: Introductions and Group Norms**

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**Materials Needed:** Journals, Writing Utensil, White Board, Poster Size Sticky Notes

**Student Handout:** Session # Introductions and Group Norms

### **Group Facilitation:**

Put the classroom into a circle, removing all the desks leaving only chairs if possible. Write outline for Group #1 on the board. The visual outline provides structure to the group.

Introduce the outline to group participants. There are five steps to Session #1. Provide each group member the Session #1 Handout.

### **Post on White Board:**

- Welcome and Introduction to the Group
- Journaling - please have journals and a pen/pencil
- Establishing Group Norms
- Small Group Work
- Large Group Work
- Past Group Experience
- Student expectations of group experience
- Journaling
- Closure and Reflections of the day

**Opener:** It is possible that each of you are feeling a wide range of emotions this morning, and I thought it might be helpful to spend just a couple of minutes writing down those emotions in our journals. This piece of writing will not be shared with anyone unless you choose to.

**WRITING (5 min)** I have provided each of you with a few writing prompts to help with the writing process. This is your personal writing, so express yourself in whatever way you would like. We will revisit these initial feelings throughout group today and at the end of the group experience.

**Step I: Initial Writing Prompts/Ideas:** Please write for 2 minutes to prompt 1, 2, or 3. This will not be collected....

1. I am feeling.....

Worried, Scared, Anxious, Overwhelmed, Cautious, Nervous, etc...

2. I am thinking....

3. When I walked into the room this morning I felt or thought.....

### **Step II: Group Norms/Purpose of Group**

The purpose of this psychoeducational group is to talk with student-athletes about goal setting, experiences on teams and in leadership capacities, and struggles related to involvement in sports and how those affect the everyday life.

We will work on goal setting, developing problem solving strategies, strategies to improve performance, development of leadership and life skills to help take your sport experience to the next level.

So, let's discuss some **group agreements**: An agreement is something all members have the right to expect such as:

- Confidentiality
- The Right to Pass
- The Right to participate
- The Right to talk openly about yourself
- Members to Be fully present with the group

*What other norms or agreements would you like to establish?*

**Post the agreed upon norms for student-athletes to see for each group.** It is suggested that each member sign the paper with the norms on it.

**Step III: Pair/Share (5-10 min)** Divide into groups of two: In these pairs, you will share the following with each other and then introduce your partner to the rest of us. Feel free to write this down on the paper provided:

Where were you born?

What are your favorite ways to have fun?

Where are you in the birth order of your family?

What is your favorite sport to play?

What is your favorite sport to watch?

Share out with the whole group...

### **Activity: Fear in a Hat**

Each student will write down one fear or worry they have about group participation or their sport on a piece of paper. Crumple the paper and place it in the hat provided. The worries/fears will be collected in a hat and randomly redistributed to other group members. Each student will read the fear out loud and the group will discuss and come to an understanding of that fear. The person who wrote the fear should remain anonymous unless they self-disclose.

### **Step IV: CLOSURE**

Looking back on the first few moments when you walked into this group this morning, how have your emotions, thoughts, or feelings changed?

This last piece of writing will be shared with me, and only me....Pick one sentence stem.

1. When I first walked into group this morning I was feeling.....
2. Now that the first group is over, I am feeling.....
3. Any last thoughts that we want to share?

**Step V: Homework.** For the next group session I would like you to think about one aspect of your sport you are doing well in, and one aspect that you would like to change or work on. We will discuss this in the next group.

**Reminder that what is discussed in group remains in group.**

## **Student Handout Session #1: Introductions and Group Norms**

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**Initial Writing Prompts/Ideas:** Please write for 2 minutes to prompt 1, 2, or 3. This will not be collected....

1. I am feeling.....  
Worried, Scared, Anxious, Overwhelmed, Cautious, Nervous, etc...
2. I am thinking....
3. When I walked into the room this morning I felt or thought.....

**Pair/Share (5-10 min)** Divide into groups of two. In these pairs, you will share the following with each other and then introduce your partner to the rest of us. Feel free to write this down on the paper provided:

Where were you born?  
What are your favorite ways to have fun?  
Where are you in the birth order of your family?  
What is your favorite sport to play?  
What is your favorite sport to watch?  
Share out with the whole group...

**Final Writing:** Answer both prompts please. This WILL be collected on paper provided, but only shared with me as the group leader.

1. When I first walked into to class this morning I was thinking.....
2. Now that we have completed our first group together, I am feeling or thinking.....

## Session #2: Goal Setting and Skills of Success

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**Materials Needed:** 3M Projector, Internet Access, Laptop, Document Reader

**Student Handout:** Session #2 - Goal Setting and Skills of Success.

**Group Facilitation:** The purpose of session two will be to focus on the Mental Skills for Success, Goal Setting, and visualization techniques to enhance performance. Start group by providing students the handout about mental skills (see attached). Have students rank the list of mental skills they believe are important for high school athletes to possess. Discussion to follow.

**Opener:** Introduce the session goals. Have students rank the following list in order of significance to you.

**Step I:** Start off this session with a list of mental skills of successful high school athletes

1. Attitude
2. Motivation
3. Setting Goals
4. Relationships with Teammates
5. Positive Self-talk
6. Mental Imagery/Visualization
7. Teamwork
8. Concentration
9. Managing Anxiety/Emotions
10. Academics

1. Rank these skills in order of 1-10 of importance to you as an athlete.
2. Are there any skills on this list that you find difficult to manage?
3. Are any of these skills you would like to improve upon?
4. Pick one of these areas that you will focus on this week. Be prepared to report back during the next session regarding your progress and feelings associated with focusing on ONE area.

**Step II: Team Dynamics/Past Group Experience** Questions and discussion relating to past group/team experiences.

- What benefits have you had from working on a team before? Personal example
- What less than beneficial experiences have you had working in a group/team setting?  
Give the option of sharing or passing.

**Step III: Imagery/Discussion.** Show students several images of athletes performing an athletic task. Students will look at the image either using a document reader or a PowerPoint with each image posted. Give students a few seconds for each image. Ask students to discuss what they see in the image as a positive or negative with regards to the athlete's physical, emotional or psychological performance. The following pages have five images – the links to these pictures are on resource page, but facilitators may choose other appropriate images.





Image #1

[www.outsideonline.com](http://www.outsideonline.com)

Image #2



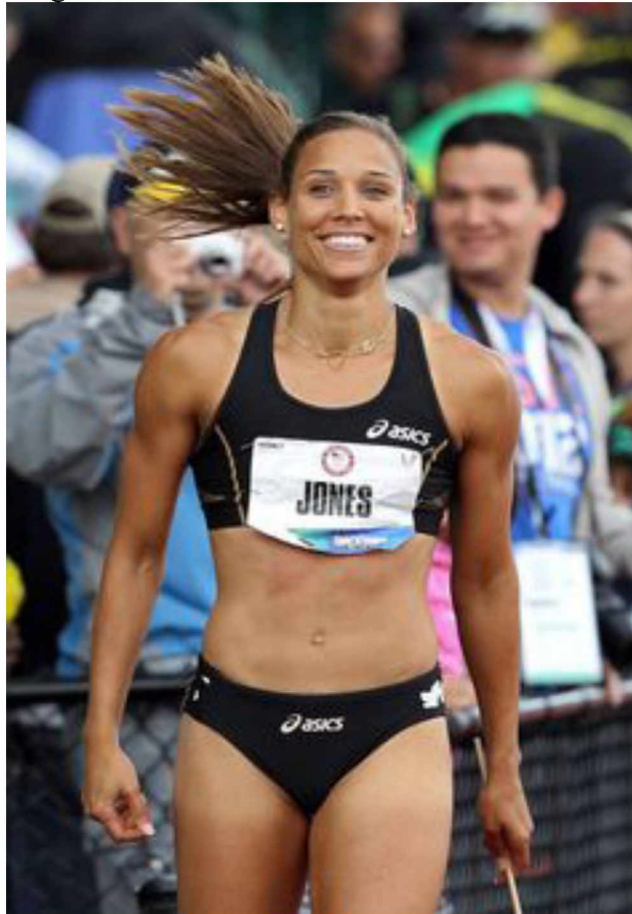
[www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)

Image #3



[www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)

Image #4



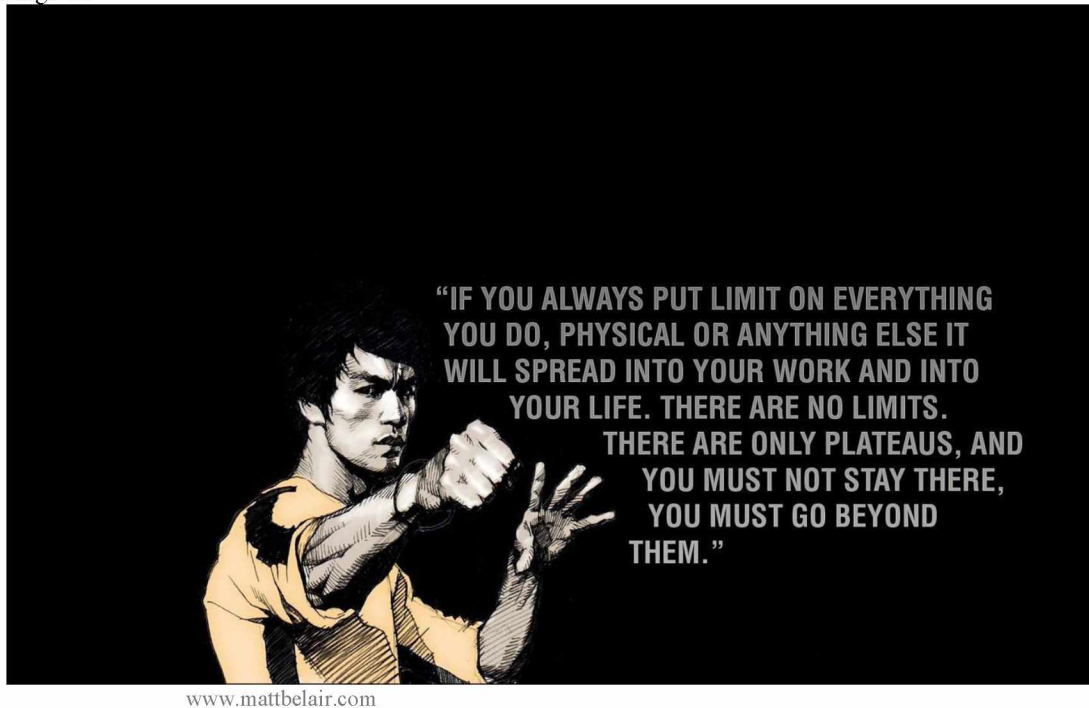
[www.outsideonline.com](http://www.outsideonline.com)

Image #5



[www.stack.com](http://www.stack.com)

Image #6



Discuss the Bruce Lee quote.

**Step IV: Closure:** Recap the goals and norms of Session #2.

**Step V: Homework.** Take one of the goals from today's activity and focus on improving or achieving that goal. Be prepared to share how that worked this past week. Be sure to encourage participants to post the goal somewhere visible so they are reminded to work on that goal throughout the week.

## **Student Handout/Session #2: Goal Setting and Skills of Success**

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### **Mental Skills of Successful High School Athletes**

1. Attitude
2. Motivation
3. Setting Goals
4. Relationships with Teammates
5. Positive Self-talk
6. Mental Imagery/Visualization
7. Teamwork
8. Concentration
9. Managing Anxiety/Emotions
10. Academics

1. Rank these skills in order of 1-10 of importance to you as an athlete.
2. Are there any skills on this list that you find difficult to manage?
3. Any of these skills you would like to improve upon?
4. Pick one of these areas that you will focus on this week. Be prepared to report back during the next session regarding your progress and feelings associated with focusing on ONE area.

### **Team Dynamics/Past Group Experience**

What benefits have you had from working on a team before?

What less than beneficial experiences have you had working in a group/team setting?

**Imagery:** You will see 5 images of athletes in various stages of performance. Look at the images and write down: the first thing that comes to your mind about the image, what is the focal point of the image, and describe the mental state of the athlete or group. Are the images positive or negative?

We will discuss each image as a group.

### **Homework:**

Take one of the goals from today's activity and focus on improving or achieving that goal. Be prepared to share how that worked this past week. Be sure to post the goal somewhere visible so you are reminded to work on that goal throughout the week.



### Session #3: Goal Setting and Teamwork

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**Materials:** 3M Projector, computers with Internet access, whiteboard, butcher paper, markers, journals

**Student Handouts:** Distribute Session #3 - Goal Setting and Teamwork; Goal Setting Checklist

**Group Facilitation:** The purpose of this session is to introduce goal setting and teamwork building skills for success and enjoyment. Group members will review two short videos relating to goal setting, motivation, and challenges, and then have a discussion regarding their responses. Group members will participate in an activity focused on fostering positive team dynamics.

#### Lesson Outline:

Opener (3-5 minutes)  
Goal setting #1 handout and discussion (5 min)  
Video Review 1 and 2 and discussion (10 min)  
Activity: Team Building (5 min)  
Goal Setting #2 handout and discussion (5 min)  
Closure  
Homework

**Opener:** Students will be given a handout on goal setting. Students will set three goals today that will be revisited in the next session. Remind the group about the homework from last session and have students take one minute each to discuss homework from last week - one problem that needs to be addressed and one goal they are working on.

**Step I: Goal Setting.** Write three goals in your journals that you want to accomplish this season.

1. One sport goal:
2. One academic/school related goal:
3. One goal of your choice (sport, academic, personal, social):

Adapted from: Dr. Megan Babkes, Ed. D

**Step II: Film Review.** Students will watch and discuss two short videos on goal setting, failure and motivation.

Watch-Video: #1Goal Setting For Athletes (3 minutes)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DO0OnX\\_GCa8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DO0OnX_GCa8)

Video#2-Famous Failures (2.58 min.)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLYECIjmnQs>

**Discussion:** How did the athletes in the videos stay motivated, utilize goal setting, and deal with failure?

**Step III: Activity.** Team Building The Birthday Game

Students must line up in order of their birthday without speaking to one another. They may gestures and may use symbols, but they may not use words to communicate.

**Step IV: Closure and Homework.** Work on one short term attainable goal for the next session using skills from the list from Session #2: Goal Setting.

**Student Handout 1/Session #3: Goal Setting & Teamwork**

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Write three goals that you want to accomplish this season.

1. One sport goal:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. One academic/school related goal:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. One goal of your choice (sport, academic, personal, social):

**Student Handout 2/Session #3: Goal Setting Checklist**

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## Goal Setting Checklist

Take the 3 goals from Worksheet #1 and place a ✓ mark next to each goal.

	Goal #1	Goal #2	Goal #3
Specific			
Attainable			
Realistic			
Short Term			
Long Term			
Simple			
Challenging			
Written down			
Posted where you can see them			
Shared with others			
Re-evaluated and updated			

Adapted: Dr. Megan Babkes. Ed. D



## Session #4: The Essence of Leadership

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**Materials Needed:** 3M Projector, Lap Top, Wireless access to You Tube Videos,

**Student Handout:** Copies of Article Essence of Leadership

**Link to Video on Leadership:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBLEojrBIQU>

**Group Facilitation:** The purpose of Session #4 will be to focus on the definition of leadership. This session will utilize videos and articles on leadership to provide concrete examples of leadership qualities. Coach K of Duke, and Mia Hamm, professional soccer player are the focal points of the social media examples used in this session.

**Opener:** Ask students the following questions for discussion: What kind of person comes to mind when you hear the word leader? What words can we come up with to describe a leader?

### Step I: Video

Coach K <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBLEojrBIQU>

Watch interview with Coach K of Duke about leadership (5 min)

- Discussion: What does leadership look like to you?

**Step II: Article Review.** Reading on the *Essence of Mia* (Can read in group, or assign for homework)

Article link: <http://espn.go.com/espnw/tittle-ix/article/8078671/the-essence-mia-hamm>

**Step III: Journaling.** Fast Write - What leadership qualities do you possess or do you like in others? After responding in journals, lead students in a brief discussion about leadership qualities.

### Step IV: Activity - Life Highlights

Ask each group member to close their eyes and think of a highlight in their lives. This can be a sport moment, or otherwise. Once all members have a highlight chosen, inform them they have to narrow that highlight down to 30 seconds of their life that they would like to relive if they only had 30 seconds to live. Ask members to share their highlight with the group.

**Step V: Closure/Homework.** The Miracle Question (SFBT) (Corey et al., 2014)

If a miracle happened and the problems in your sport have disappeared overnight, how would you know it was solved, and what would be different? Come to the next session with a problem or issue to discuss with the group.

## Student Handout/Session #4: Essence of Leadership

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### *The Essence of Mia*

By Julie Foudy (2012)

Reference: <http://espn.go.com/espnw/title-ix/article/8078671/the-essence-mia-hamm>



Harry How/Getty Images

Best female athlete of the past 40 years? Mia Hamm. And she was even better as a teammate, says Julie Foudy, left.

I would bet a fine dinner (without kids) and my left leg (just a kickstand anyway) that, upon learning she has been chosen as the No. 1 female athlete of the past 40 years, Mia Hamm will shake her head, smile sheepishly and say, with a hint of incredulity, "*Really?! That cannot be true with all the great female athletes of this era.*"

And *that* is the essence of Mia. It is why she transcended sports. It is why she is so beloved. It is why I constantly thank her for providing the foundation for our national team and guiding our growth, and for giving girls around the globe hope that they, too, can wear a sports jersey, tear apart defenses and dominate with grace and a smile.

Everyone knows what Mia did as an athlete. You know about her successes and awards as the best female soccer player in the world. But it's her refreshingly sincere selflessness -- in everything she does -- that helped make her an icon.

The irony of it all, of course, is that Mia never wanted the attention. She just wanted to play. And she wanted to win. I mean, she *REALLY* wanted to win. When she was thrust into the spotlight in the late 1990s, she could have easily declined interviews, refused photo shoots, shied away from the media. Instead, and intuitively, without anyone ever telling her what had to be done, Mia understood that women's soccer needed attention.



Reuters

Hamm could dazzle with her brilliance on the field and impress with her graciousness off it.

She understood that girls needed to see other girls playing sports. She understood that the popularity of soccer rested almost squarely upon her shoulders. Most of all, and perhaps most important to our team's success, she understood that it was about the group, not about her.

This unselfishness, her willingness to deflect and graciously thank others, is what I will always cherish the most when I think of Mia's many qualities. Because her way of doing things showed her teammates, along with millions of girls and boys and grown-ups, that success is about working your tail off, motivating others to join you and celebrating others when the focus could be on you.

One of my favorite examples of Mia's insatiable quest for the greater good was before the 1999 Women's World Cup. When asked to do a magazine cover shoot, Mia said, "I would love to -- if I can do it with these four players, as well." And that's how five teammates ended up on the cover. (This kind of thing happened often.)

Whenever she accepted an award, Mia would spend the first 10 minutes thanking her teammates, family, coaches, friends, doctors, trainers, past teachers, etc., for helping her achieve success. She did it honestly and never for show. Mia's unwavering commitment to the group defined who we were as a team. She set the standard for all of us to follow.

Be strong, be tough, be competitive, be a family. Respect the game. Respect each other.

I know that I speak for all of my former teammates when I say that luck found us when we were given the opportunity to play alongside Mia and to watch her dominance from the front row. But I think I am most blessed to be able to call her a friend. (As we mention to her often, she is stuck with us for life.)

Mia, thanks for what you have done and continue to do to show the world why sports is so much more than just wins and losses. Thanks for showing young kids that they don't have to

compromise who they are to find success. Thanks for being a constant reminder of the brilliant balance between competing and collaborating. Thanks for inspiring generations to come.

And thanks mostly, well ... for just being you.



## **Session #5: Leadership, Maximizing Potential, & Visualization**

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**Materials Needed:** 3M Projector, Laptop, Internet Access

**Student Handout:** Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs/Visualization Representation; How to Visualize

**Group Facilitation:** The purpose of this session is to introduce students to positive, or humanistic psychology, and apply the principle of Carl Rogers' person-centered approach in developing positive self-talk and strategies to enhance performance through visualization techniques.

**Opener:** Introduce Athletes to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

### **Background on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:**

Abraham Maslow is a proponent of Positive Psychology, which stresses the human potential and unconditional positive regard. Maximizing potential of a student-athlete can be completed through setting attainable goals. The hierarchy can be explained in the following pages. There is a pyramid and student handout that provides the student athlete with a guide to the Hierarchy of Needs as outlined by Abraham Maslow. Maslow and Carl Rogers developed Humanistic Psychology or the Person Centered Approach. This approach can be applied well to student-athletes. One of the key components is unconditional positive regard and working with the student to help achieve personal goals. (see following pages).

**Step I: Reading.** Hand out the reading on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This is an introduction to positive psychology techniques. The first part of this session will be the discussion of maximizing potential through visualization techniques for athletes.

**Step II: Team Activity.** Visualizing the win. Sports psychologists stress that visualization is one of the most important components leading to the success of athletes. Visualization requires one to utilize all of the senses. Student-athletes will be asked to practice guided visualization relating to one component of their sport, i.e. free throw shooting, or the start of a sprint in track.

**Step III: Video on Visualization.** Watch a 7-minute video by sports psychologist, Loren Fogelman outlining how to use visualization to enhance performance.

Video link: <http://expertsportsperformance.com/visualization/>

Discussion question: Do you see yourself as a winner? If so, what does that look like?  
Do you have a picture of clear performance goals?

**Step IV:** Handout on Visualization Techniques. Go over the handout on visualization with students and ask them to visualize as homework.

**Closure:** Practice visualizing one or more areas of your sport

## **Student Handout/Session #5: The Hierarchy of Needs**

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### **Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Adapted from Saul McLeod <http://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Adapted: <https://virtualb3.wikispaces.com>

Below is a cheat sheet to help guide students to an understanding about what motivates us to reach one's fullest potential. Maslow stresses that we need to feel belonging, a sense of accomplishment, a desire to learn, explore, and discover the world around us to be fulfilled. The focus is to determine what motivates you, and what do you need as a student-athlete to reach your fullest potential?

### **Self-Actualization**

Self-actualization is the summit of Maslow's motivation theory. It is about the quest of reaching one's full potential as a person. Unlike lower level needs, this need is never fully satisfied; as one grows psychologically there are always new opportunities to continue to grow.

Self-actualized people tend to have motivators such as:

- Truth
- Justice
- Wisdom
- Meaning

Self-actualized persons have frequent occurrences of *peak experiences*, which are energized moments of profound happiness and harmony. According to Maslow, only a small percentage of the population reaches the level of self-actualization.

### **Esteem Needs**

After a person feels that they "belong", the urge to attain a degree of importance emerges.

Esteem needs can be categorized as external motivators and internal motivators.

Internally motivating esteem needs are those such as self-esteem, accomplishment, and self respect. External esteem needs are those such as reputation and recognition.

Some examples of esteem needs are:

- Recognition (external motivator)
- Attention (external motivator)
- Social Status (external motivator)
- Accomplishment (internal motivator)
- Self-respect (internal motivator)

Maslow later improved his model to add a layer in between self-actualization and esteem needs: the need for aesthetics and knowledge.

### **Social Needs**

Once a person has met the lower level physiological and safety needs, higher level motivators awaken. The first level of higher level needs are social needs. Social needs are those related to interaction with others and may include:

- Friendship
- Belonging to a group

- Giving and receiving love

**Safety Needs**

Once physiological needs are met, one's attention turns to safety and security in order to be free from the threat of physical and emotional harm. Such needs might be fulfilled by:

- Living in a safe area
- Medical insurance
- Job security
- Financial reserves

According to the Maslow hierarchy, if a person feels threatened, needs further up the pyramid will not receive attention until that need has been resolved.

**Physiological Needs**

Physiological needs are those required to sustain life, such as:

- Air
- Water
- Food
- Sleep

According to this theory, if these fundamental needs are not satisfied then one will surely be motivated to satisfy them. Higher needs such as social needs and esteem are not recognized until one satisfies the needs basic to existence.

Adapted: <https://virtualb3.wikispaces.com/>

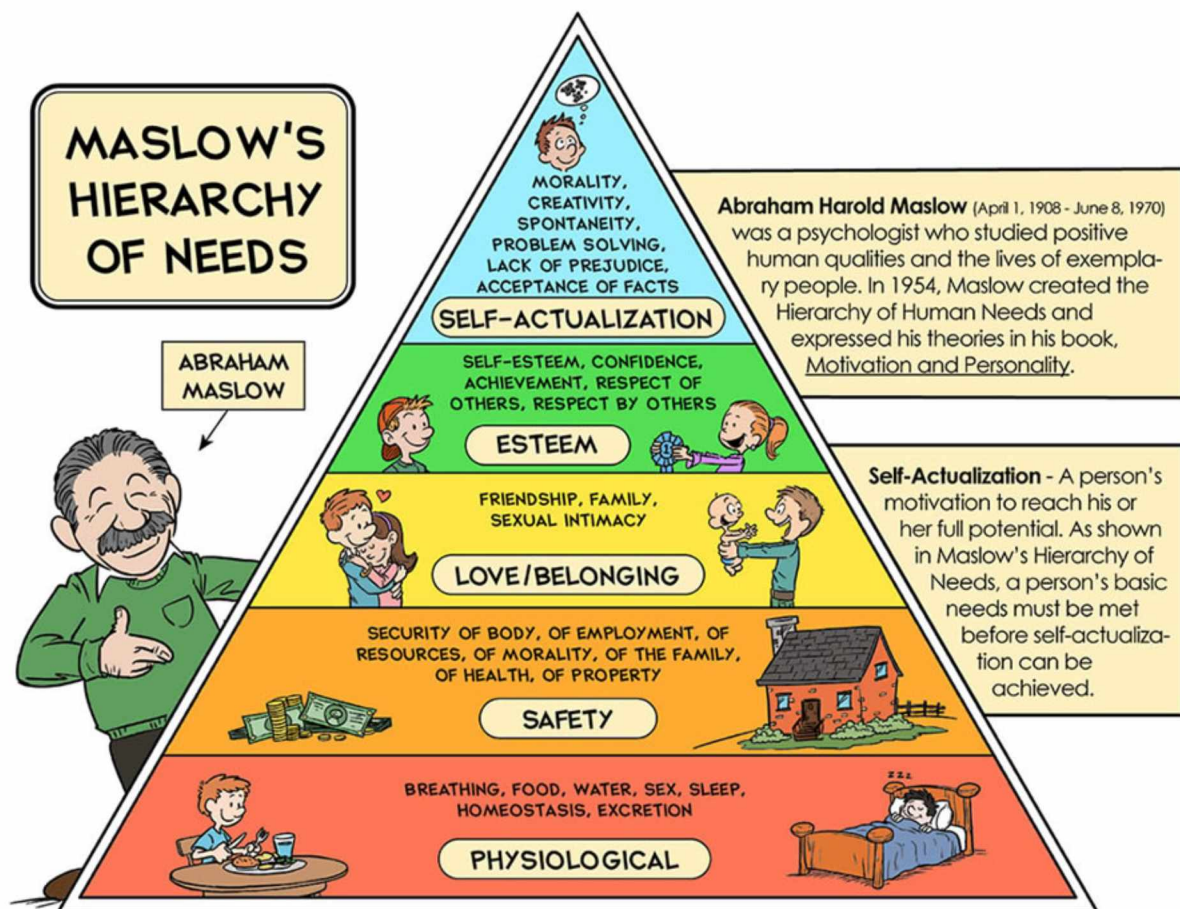
**Homework:**

What can you do as an athlete to reach your maximum potential and enjoyment in your sport?  
How can athletes work together on a team to reach their fullest potential?

## Student Handout/Session #5: Handout 2

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs/Visual Representation

<https://brilliantnurse.com/nclex-prioritization-questions-maslows-hierarchy-needs-theory/>





**Student Handout/Session #5: Handout 3**

# How to Visualize

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**Your ability to learn how to visualize depends on your ability to find a quiet place, clear your mind and imagine your goals. Follow the 3 simple steps below to start visualizing.**



## 1. Find a Quiet Place

The first step in learning how to visualize is to find a quiet place. You can choose

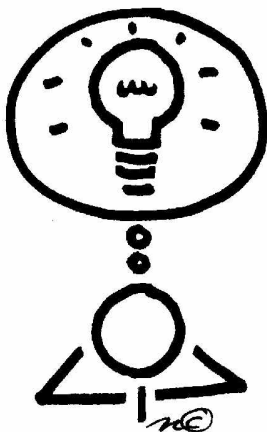
- A favorite spot in your home
- Anywhere you are not disturbed
- A beach
- The woods



## 2. Clear your Mind

When preparing for visualization, sit in a position you can be comfortable for a bit of time

- Close your eyes
- Relax by taking a few deep breaths
- Continue to focus on your breathing
- Count down from 20 each breath out
- Repeat until your mind is clear



## 3. Imagine Your Goals

Visualize all the details of your sport. Visualize as many senses as you can.

- Sights-What Are You Seeing?
- Sounds-What Do You Hear?
- People-Who is Present?
- Write down your thoughts
- Create a collage with your ideas

## Session #6: Leadership & Challenges

The Negative and the Positives, Self-Talk

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**Materials:** Journal, Writing Utensil

**Student Handout:** Session # - Article on Leadership

**Opener:** What can you do to achieve your goals? Is there anyone that can assist you in reaching your goals (i.e., coach, teammate, friend, parents, etc.)?

**Step I: Distribute article.** Students will read the following article featuring Ronda Rousey

*The Strength of a Student Athlete: Who before What (Elmore, T. 2016).*

<http://growingleaders.com/blog/the-strength-of-a-student-athlete-who-before-what/>

**Discussion:** The challenges of leadership.

What are the challenges of being the captain? Or team leader? What was your reaction to Rhonda Rousey's comments about *failure*? What does failure look like to you?

**Step II/Journaling:** Fast Write.

"Never place your identity in something that can be taken away". -Elmore

Students will share responses with the whole group.

**Step III: Building an Identity~The Tree Metaphor** - Elmore discusses the metaphor of a tree in his article. He suggests that a healthy identity looks a lot like a fully-grown tree.



**Roots** – The roots below represent identity—unseen but most important to the strength of the tree. They must be deep and intertwined with others.

**Trunk** – The trunk is visible and represents their performance. Strong roots result in a strong trunk that can withstand storms and high winds.

**Fruit** – The branches and fruit are the productivity of the athlete. Only with genuinely strong roots do we get real (not artificial) fruit: winning in life.

**Step IV: Traits of an Athlete.** After practicing visualization, spend a couple of minutes discussing traits of a healthy identity. Discuss: What does a healthy identity look like for an athlete?

**The Athlete~Healthy Identity:**

- \*It revolves around the characteristics inside you.
- \*It's based on something that cannot be taken away.
- \*It's built from beliefs that will last a lifetime
- \*It involves solving problems and serving people.
- \*It fosters satisfactions when you live up to it.
- \*It furnishes a platform to leave a legacy.

-Elmore.

**Step V: Closure.** Have members share one positive thing they learned today in group.

**Step VI: Homework.** Practice visualization and continue with working on goals set in the first two sessions.



## Student Handout/Session #6: Article on Leadership

<http://growingleaders.com/blog/the-strength-of-a-student-athlete-who-before-what/#sthash.KLYvtbZl.dpuf>

### The Strength of a Student Athlete: Who Before What

By Tim Elmore

February 25, 2016

Less than three months ago, former bantamweight champion Ronda Rousey stunned fans when she lost a match [to Holly Holm](#). It was a huge upset. I bring this up because Rousey represents a vivid case study of too many young athletes today. In a [nationwide interview](#) on the Ellen DeGeneres show, Rousey became transparent about her emotional trauma after the loss. She told everyone that as she sat in the medical room, her first thoughts were: “What am I anymore if I’m not this? I was literally sitting there thinking about killing myself... and that exact second I am like, ‘I’m nothing, what do I do anymore, and no one gives a \*\*\*\* about me anymore without this (title).’”

Somehow she’d lost sight of who she really was. Rule #1: Never place your identity in something that can be taken away.

In that moment, her entire identity was wrapped up in being the best at her sport. While that sounds great on the surface, it’s just not healthy. Her will to go on was temporarily lost because it was all about a match—not her person. Had she forgotten:

- She was an amazing swimsuit model for *Sports Illustrated*? (So I’ve heard).
- She had a caring boyfriend in Travis Brown, a UFC star?
- She is followed by people everywhere—for more than her MMA title?

Research shows that athletes are stronger and more resilient at their sport when they construct an identity that goes *beyond* the sport. We’ve also learned that athletes who’ve developed a healthy sense of identity outside of one sport are better able to handle adversity; to remain emotionally stable and to fight angst. It’s why so many NCAA Division I coaches insist on recruiting multiple-sport athletes out of high schools. Coaches want healthy, steady players. It has been said so many times it has become cliché, but it is still true. Athletes must be able to honestly say, “My sport is what I do, not who I am.”

### Walking the Fine Line



So, how do coaches build a healthy sense of identity in student athletes, while still cultivating championship caliber players? Is it possible to have players lay it all on the line, while competing, but still not tie their entire personhood to the sport?

I believe it is. John Wooden has done it. Pat Summit has done it. Sue Enquist has done it. Tony Dungy has done it. Pat Murphy has done it. And the list goes on. Each of these coaches have helped young athletes construct an identity that includes their sport as a major part of who they are, but not entirely who they are. It's a fine line.

### **“Who” Before “What”**

Young athletes must settle *who* they are, before deciding *what* they'll do. If they get this order wrong, they can become a basket case, building an identity around something that can be taken away. After all, one day their “sports days of glory” will end. Wisdom says, “A strong *who* leads to a strong and lasting *what*, but not the other way around.”

When I speak to audiences full of coaches and athletes about this topic, I always show a diagram of a tree. I believe healthy identity looks a lot like a fully-grown tree.

- **Roots** – The roots below represent identity—unseen but most important to the strength of the tree. They must be deep and intertwined with others.
- **Trunk** – The trunk is visible and represents their performance. Strong roots result in a strong trunk that can withstand storms and high winds.
- **Fruit** – The branches and fruit are the productivity of the athlete. Only with genuinely strong roots do we get real, (not artificial) fruit: winning in life.

### **The Elements of Healthy Identity**

After three decades of working with college students, I have observed that healthy, resilient athletes are the result of coaches and staff who enable young athletes to build their identity around elements beyond their single sport. In other words, your athletes need you to help them model the elements of a healthy identity:

- \* It revolves around the characteristics inside you.
- \* It's based on something that cannot be taken away.
- \* It's built from beliefs that will last a lifetime.
- \* It involves solving problems and serving people.
- \* It fosters satisfaction when you live up to it.
- \* It furnishes a platform to leave a legacy.

For years, Becky Hammon was an incredible college and professional basketball player. One reason is, she's not only talented but she's also built a strong sense of identity. Not long ago, Becky became the first female coach in NBA history. She is paving the way for others who follow. In the process, however, she's taken a lot of flack from those who believe the NBA is for men, not women. [In an interview](#), she was asked about how she handles the adversity. Her answer revealed her robust sense of self. She simply said, “I know who I am... When you get comfortable with yourself like that and you know you're doing the right thing, you can take a lot of crap.”

Let's go build strong people. If we do, we will get strong athletes.



## Lesson #7: Qualities of a Captain

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**Materials Needed:** 3 M projector, laptop, links to video, Journal, Writing Utensils, 4 golf clubs, 4 solo cups or similar cups, 4 golf balls, tape to draw lines on the floor

**Introduction:** Students will watch the video on the characteristics of a good captain (see link below). After viewing, lead a brief discussion about the qualities of a captain. Personalize: have students write down the qualities they admire in a captain. The video link is below. Next, group members will participate in an activity with a modified putt putt golf experience in the classroom, then have discussion and closure.

### Step I: Video. *What Makes a Great Captain?*

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wwlsio2DMfk>

Discussion about leadership and qualities of a good captain.

Encourage students to write down qualities they admire in a team captain. Which of those attributes do they possess themselves?

### Step II: Activity. Team Building with Putt Putt Golf.

This activity requires 4 solo cups, 4 small golf clubs, and 4 golf balls. Students will work in teams of two and will compete with the other teams to get the golf ball in the solo cup as many times as they can in one minute. The partner who is not using the golf club will record “holes in one” and the overall amount that made it into the cup in one minute. After one minute, switch out with your partner and rotate to a new “hole”. After all four holes, students will add up the amount of balls they got into the hole. Prizes may be candy for the winners.

#### Briefly discuss:

- What was challenging about the activity?
- How the teams worked in pairs to achieve the goal of most balls in the cup. What skills did you use to accomplish your task, or your goals?
- How did you utilize your personal skills, and/or team skills to accomplish the task?
- If a teammate were struggling with a task, what would you do as a leader to encourage your teammate?

**Step III: Closure.** Discuss the role of the team captain and how that role is so important to the success of a team. Also, refer to the video regarding the fact that a leader doesn’t necessarily have to be a captain. Note: The next session will be our last session.

### Step IV: Homework

**Journaling:** Have your goals changed from the beginning of group?

What one goal would you like to work on after you leave group?

## Session #8: Final Session

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**Materials Needed:** Journals, Student Handout, Writing Utensil

**Student Handout:** Session #8 – Final Group Session; Group Evaluation

**Opener:** Discuss conclusion of group. Highlight and lead a discussion about what goals have been met, and what goals may be set in the future. Reflect on the positives of the group experience.

**Step I: Journaling.** Ask the following questions and have students respond in journals (5 min)

- How can we be sure that our goals are met?
- Where did you succeed as a member of a team?
- What are the positive about the group experience?
- What positives team experiences have you had this season?
- Are there any concerns you still have?

**Step II: Discussion.** Have students discuss in pairs their feelings about group ending and the answers to the questions in Step I. Group discussion to follow.

- Self-Disclosure: It would be appropriate at this time for the group facilitator to share personal stories relating to sports experience. This may include struggles with coaches as an athlete, stories about one's children's participation in sports, or examples of time when these strategies were helpful in fostering the potential of the facilitator in sports or otherwise.

**Step III: Journaling.** Student-athletes will be asked:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about the group ending?
- What reactions do you have to the ending of group?
- What skills do you see yourself using as an athlete? (e.g. goal setting, visualization)?
- Do you see yourself more prepared for leadership as a captain?
- What lasting strategies for being a positive teammate will you take away from your group experience (Corey et al., 2014)?

**Step IV: Closure.** Share final thoughts on the group ending.

**Step V: Survey.** Pass out the anonymous Survey about the group experience to turn in at the end of session. The survey will be used to improve the group experience for next group.

## **Student Handout/Session #8: Final Group Session**

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**Step I:** In pairs discuss future dreams, goals, personal growth areas and how to move in that direction after the group ends.

- Where did you succeed as a member of a team?
- What are the positives about the group experience?
- What positive team experiences have you had this season?

**Step II: Journal Prompts.**

- What are your thoughts and feelings about the group ending?
- What reactions do you have to ending of group?
- What skills do you see yourself using as an athlete? (e.g. goal setting, visualization)
- Do you see yourself more prepared for leadership as a captain?
- What lasting strategies for being a positive teammate will you take away from your group experience (Corey et al., 2014)?

**Step III:** Group Survey. Fill out the anonymous survey regarding group experience. You do not need to put your name on it. This will help the facilitator improve upon future group experiences.



### Group Evaluation

Please respond to the items below based on your experience in the psychoeducational sports psychology group.

1. Overall this group was helpful to me.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
2. I was able to set goals and work to achieve them.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
3. I felt supported by other group members.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
4. The counselor was able to provide guidance and support when I needed it.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
5. The activities were useful to me as an athlete.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
6. The activities helped me to understand leadership better.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
7. The visualization handout helped me improve in my sport.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
8. The thing I liked best about group was:
9. The thing I liked least about group was:
10. If I could change anything about this group it would be:

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